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ABSTRACT

The local school board has traditionally been the predominant control mechanism for public education in this country. Since the 1970s however, increased legislation and reform in statehouses across the nation have functioned to reduce the discretion enjoyed by local boards. This paper represents an attempt to sketch this increase in state intervention and the resulting erosion of local control over the past few decades. The sketch begins with a theoretical framework that provides an analytical perspective on the nexus between state and local educational policy-making. This is followed by a brief historical overview of local control and an identification of the issues and arguments surrounding local control. Discussions on the future of school board control and possible avenues of research follow. (Contains 88 footnotes and 44 references.) (Author)

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# SACRIFICING LIBERTY FOR EQUALITY:

# THE EROSION OF LOCAL CONTROL IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

An occasional paper
for the Louisiana LEAD Project
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**ABSTRACT**

The local school board has traditionally been the predominant control mechanism for public education in this country. Since the 1970s however, increased legislation and reform in state houses across the nation have functioned to reduce the discretion enjoyed by local boards. This paper represents an attempt to sketch this erosion of control over the past few decades as a result of increased state intervention. The sketch begins with a theoretical framework which provides an analytical perspective on the nexus between state and local educational policy-making. This is followed by a brief historical overview of local control and an identification of the issues and arguments surrounding local control. Discussions on the future of school board control and possible avenues of research follow.

## THE ISSUE

Arguments and ideas regarding the locus of control of American education have recently been the source of much discussion and debate.[1] Historically, the struggle between various levels of government for policy-making supremacy has resulted in an acceptable state of inter-governmental equilibrium. In the area of educational policy, the local school board has traditionally been the predominant control mechanism in this country.

Although current arguments about who should control public education generally do not consider the complete exclusion of any level of government, educational governance in the United States is experiencing a change in this balance of power between local, state, and federal policy-makers.[2] Local control is being threatened. Federal and state lawmakers, sensing public dissatisfaction with the quality of education, have aggressively

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[1]"Control" in this context is defined as policy-making authority. With regard to education, "locus of control" is used throughout this paper to refer to that level of government where the predominance of policy-making authority--whether actual or legal--lies. Within an organizational setting, Ouchi and Maguire have defined control in terms of policy-making authority. See William G. Ouchi and Mary Ann Maguire, "Organizational Control: Two Functions," Administrative Science Quarterly 12 1 (December 1975): 559-569.

[2]William C. French, "Local Control Under Attack," in Government in the Classroom, edited by Mary F. Williams (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979): 8.

created legislation for educational improvement.[3] The 1960's, 70's and 80's have witnessed the evolution of an increasingly centralized educational governing structure. As a principle, "local control" has remained unchallenged. In fact, however, centralizing forces such as state and federal mandates, the courts, national testing agencies, and nationwide interest groups, have made "home rule" more of an antiquated illusion than an actuality.[4]

This centralizing trend in educational governance is significant and worthy of investigation for three reasons. First, precedent is being challenged. Educational governance has historically been a local activity. The control of education at the local level reflects the basic fabric of traditional American character.[5] Although control appears to be eroding, local

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[3]Twenty-five years ago state educational policy-making systems were viewed as weak and ineffectual. Few governors were giving attention to educational issues and problems. Today, however, this picture has changed dramatically. Local control is being seriously challenged by state initiatives. In the 1980's many governors have declared education to be their highest priority, e.g. Tennessee's Lamar Alexander, Louisiana's Buddy Roemer, etc. Furthermore, state legislatures are perceived to be the most powerful actors in educational policy-making. See Douglas E. Mitchell, Frederick Wirt, and Charles Marshall, Final Report: Alternative State Policy Mechanisms for Pursuing Educational Quality, Efficiency and Equity Goals, (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1986). As Sharkansky predicted, for the 1980's, states will be the work horses of our federal system. Ira Sharkansky, The Maligned States: Policy Accomplishments, Problems and Opportunities, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971).

[4]Michael W. Kirst, Who Controls Our Schools? (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979): 97.

[5]Roald F. Campbell, Luvern L. Cunningham, Raphael O. Nystrand, and Michael D. Usdan, The Organization and Control of American Schools, fifth edition (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing

discretion in public education is well established. Citizen involvement in educational governance reflects the essence of a political tradition that regards distant control with suspicion.[6] Cremin identifies the delegation of local governance to ordinary citizens--specifically that of public education--as a critical feature of the American Revolution.[7] Yet in spite of such precedent, it is suggested that today's schools are less representative of the will of the general public than at anytime in the last 70 years.[8]

Second, the move towards centralization proves significant in that the quality of educational services delivered is affected. Local districts have witnessed progress in their systems as a result of increased state and federal intervention. This "progress" has taken various forms, i.e. subsidies, the establishment of minimum standards, development of programs for the handicapped, etc. Not all local governing bodies, however, view such impositions as beneficial to the general welfare of their districts. This is particularly true in wealthier, more successful districts where state and federal mandates have had little or no effect on the perceived quality of educational

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Co., 1985): 189.

[6]Michael W. Kirst, Who Controls Our Schools?, p.11.

[7]Lawrence A. Cremin, American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783 (New York: Harper & Row, 1970): 170.

[8]James W. Guthrie, "Educational Policy Research and the Pursuit of Equality, Efficiency, and Liberty," in Problem-Finding in Educational Administration, edited by Glenn Immegart and William L. Boyd (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1979): 102.

services being offered. More importantly, such "progress" has resulted in a sacrifice of power and control to higher levels of government. The strings attached to federal/state funds and mandates have served only to reduce discretion and flexibility at the local level.

Third, disputes over the centralized control of education in this country bring into focus the conflict of three traditional American values: equity--equal treatment and equal educational opportunity; efficiency--maximizing the ratio of inputs to outputs--regardless of how each is defined; and liberty--the freedom to choose.[9] Guthrie suggests that the concomitant pursuit of these values to their ultimate fulfillment by any level of government is impossible.[10] One is naturally led to ask which of these three values is most valued. Are the three levels of government equally concerned with each?[11] Regarding issues surrounding the centralization of education, equity, as a goal of education, generates conflict when it challenges and is challenged by the values of efficiency and liberty, in particular the freedom of local governmental entities to govern the schools of their children as they wish. While local control of schools

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[9]Guthrie, "The Pursuit of Equality, Efficiency, and Liberty."

[10]Ibid., p. 90.

[11]Peterson would argue that local governments have been most effective at pursuing as a priority those policy issues which enhance their own economic well being (liberty, efficiency). State and national governments, on the other hand, have exhibited more success in dealing with redistributive and allocational policy issues (equality). Paul Peterson, City Limits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

has been a dominant value in American society, since 1954 it has collided head-on with the principle of equal educational opporunity.[12]

## PURPOSE AND UNIT OF ANALYSIS

This paper will focus on the erosion of local control in education--specifically the control of school boards--as a result of increased state intervention. It should be noted that this focus is not intended to ignore the influence of the federal government in education.[13] In fact, the last thirty years have witnessed an increase in the federal government's role. What is of concern is the role of the state as it affects the local school board. A wave of educational reform, beginning in the 70's, has produced a shift of power/discretion away from local

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[12]Kirst, Who Controls Our Schools?, p. 25.

[13]The federal government has a long history of involvement in public education. The following represent significant federal mandates/legislation:

1787 Northwest Ordinance
1862 Morrill Act I
1862 Establishment of the USOE (U.S. Office of Ed.)
1914 Smith-Hughes Vocational Act
1933 School Lunch Programs
1944 GI Bill of Rights
1954 Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education
1958 National Defense Education Act
1964 Economic Opportunities Act
1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act
1975 PL 94-142
1979 United States Dept. of Ed. is established

For a review and brief overview of each of these acts see Frederick M. Wirt and Michael W. Kirst, The Politics of Education: Schools in Conflict (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corp, 1982): 90.

school boards to state governments.[14] The trend in each state has been toward more direct state influence rather than on local school board discretion and flexibility. Federal revenue sharing has given states more influence in education. State educational agencies, once innocuous and invisible, have grown dramatically and have assumed major responsibilities in administering complex programs.[15] Such trends feed a growing concern about the proper role of state and local governments in education.[16] Kirst insists that the pendulum has swung too far.[17] While all dominant political and social forces have moved toward centralized control in education, he suggests that there is no counterforce to this shift. As of 1979 there were no states pushing for reorganization and pruning of state education

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[14]Coombs examines two states, Texas and California, and shows how reform in these states has taken educational prerogatives once left to local school boards and given them to the state. See Fred S. Coombs, "The Effects of Increased State Control on Local School District Governance," (Washington, D.C.: AERA Convention, 1987).

[15]Cuban aptly describes this phenomenon as the "remote control of schools and classrooms." See Larry Cuban, "School Reform by Remote Control: SB 813 in California," Phi Delta Kappan (November 1984): 214.

[16]In his review of the literature on the role of the state in education, Murphy highlights the concerns surrounding centralization and further raises questions regarding the proper roles of state and local governments in education. See Jerome T. Murphy, "The State Role in Education: Past Research and Future Directions," in Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis 2 4 (July-August, 1980): 39-51.

[17]Michael W. Kirst, "The State Role in Regulating Local Schools," in Government in the Classroom, edited by Mary F. Williams (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979): 45-56.

codes.[18]

Lost in the reform and feeling the frustration created by new state mandates is the local school board. According to a report developed by the Institute for Educational Leadership, school boards have expressed concern over the fact that they have neither been adequately consulted nor involved in recent state education initiatives.[19] Squeezed from the top by state government, local boards have found their discretion to make decisions further reduced by the growth of local collective bargaining contracts reinforced by national teachers' organizations.[20] These pressures are having a psychological impact on local board members in terms of their uneasiness about the future of the state's role. Most board members are concerned about the growing influence and intrusiveness of the state in local affairs. The mushrooming of mandates and centralization of policy-making have combined to produce a feeling of impotence at the local level.[21]

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[18]Ibid.

[19]This is presented as a major concern among school board members across the U.S. See Lila N. Carol, Jacqueline P. Danzberger, Barbara A. McCloud, Luvern L. Cunningham, Michael W. Kirst and Michael D. Usdan, School Boards: Strengthening Grassroots Leadership (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986): i, 11. Major school reform reports, i.e National Commission, 1983; Holmes Group, 1986; Carnegie Forum, 1986; etc. confirm that few expectations are held for school boards in the reform process. See Rodney A. Muth and Jann Azumi, "School Reform: Whither Boards of Education?" (Washington, D.C.: American Education Research Association, 1987).

[20]Kirst, Who Controls Our Schools?, p. 97.

[21]Carol, et. al., School Boards, p. 35.

School boards, despite their local responsibility for governance, have received little systematic analysis in recent years. In addition, recent reform actions, discussions and debates at the state level have failed to stress the crucial role of the local board.[22] This is indeed a curious oversight. Traditionally, school boards have filtered, interpreted, and translated the education goals of the citizenry into a mission for the local district. Although the extent and character of this governance differs from district to district and state to state, these bodies have been the channels through which citizens have effected educational policy.[23] As the personification of local control, the school board serves various functions: 1) it is the mechanism through which citizens effect local school policy; 2) it is the educational guardian of the community;[24]

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[22]Ibid., p. i.

[23]Burlingame recognizes the heterogeneity of school districts across the United States. Districts vary widely in terms of economic, social, political, religious, and educational traditions. Such heterogeneity would appear to limit our ability to generalize across districts. See Martin Burlingame, "The Politics of Education and Educational Policy: The Local Level," in Handbook of Research on Educational Administration, edited by Norman J. Boyan (New York: Longman, 1988): 449. From the political science perspective Patterson notes that the notion of "political culture" lies behind the interdistrict/interstate variations in local control. Differing value structures, he suggests, manifest themselves in the characteristic behavior and actions of states and localities. Samuel C. Patterson, "The Political Cultures of the American States," Journal of Politics 30 (February 1968): 187-209.

[24]Peshkin found this to be especially true in his ethnographic study of a small, rural farming town. See Alan Peshkin, Growing Up American: Schooling and the Survival of Community, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

3) it is the symbolic institution through which citizens rationalize their sense of pride and ownership in their schools;[25] 4) it is a major preserving force of community culture; and 5) it is the crucial link in maintaining public support for public schools.[26]

On the basis of these functions it would appear logical that any examination of the control of education at the local level focus on the local board. What follows is attempt to sketch the erosion of local control to the state over the past few decades. The sketch begins with a theoretical framework which provides an analytical perspective on the nexus between state and local educational policy-making. This is followed by a brief historical overview of local control, identification of the issues and arguments surrounding local control, conclusions on the future of local control, and some possible areas of research.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to 1960, the majority of research surrounding school administration assumed that schools operated within a closed system and that school governance was "apolitical." By tacit agreement, citizens and scholars insisted that the world of education was separate from the world of politics.[27] The

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[25]Coombs, "The Effects of Increased State Control," pp. 1-3.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Wirt and Kirst, The Politics of Education, p. 2.

persistence of this myth, as noted by Eliot in 1959, allowed school professionals to gain legitimacy, support, and control of the educational process.[28] Eliot's observations regarding the politcal nature of education represent one of the earliest attempts to analyze the governance of education from a political perspective. Following his publication, the ideas and frameworks of political science--once regarded as a misguided approach to the study of education--were incorporated into the study of educational administration. Since that time an avalanche of research focusing on the "politics of education" has appeared.[29]

To assist in conceptualizing the interaction of state and local government in the area of educational governance and to help understand the erosion of local control being experienced by school boards, David Easton's model of political inquiry would appear to have utility.[30] As a political framework, the model has several key assumptions and components. Foremost, it is

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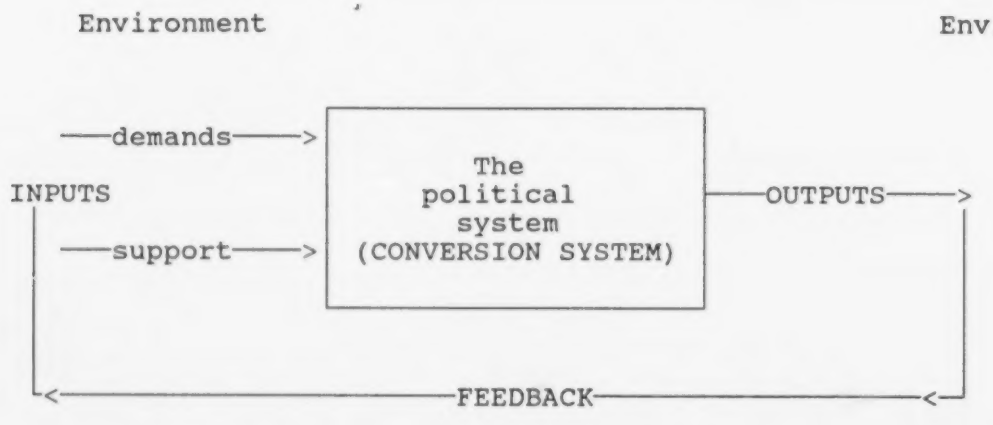
[28]Eliot was one of the first to recognize the political nature of the American educational process. See Thomas H. Eliot, "Toward an Understanding of Public School Politics," American Political Science Review 52 (1959): 1032-1051. Likewise, Iannaccone described how professional educators incorporated this apolitical orientation of schools by asserting that education is a "closed system" and therefore isolated from politics and external control. Laurence Iannaccone, Politics of Education (New York: Center for Applied Research in Education, 1967).

[29]For an idea of how political science has influenced the study of education see Donald H. Layton, "The Emergence of the Politics of Education as a Field of Study," in The Management of Educational Institutions edited by H.L. Gray (Barcombe, Lewes, England: Falmer Press, 1982): 109-126.

[30]David Easton, A Framework for Political Analysis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

*heuristic. Rather than being predictive, heuristic theory has* analytical value. As a tool of analysis, it allows one to separate and categorize human experience. In this context the experience under consideration is human interaction--more specifically, human political interaction as expressed within those systems of society created for the governance of education.

**EASTON'S MODEL OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM**




Easton defines a political system as "those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society."[31]

To further understand Easton's approach to political inquiry, the "system" assumption of the model must likewise be

[31]Ibid., pp. 128-130.

noted. A social system may be defined as a bounded set of elements (subsystems) that interact and constitute a single social entity.[32] Systems theory conceptualizes society as a collection of "open" social subsystems both interdependent on each other and the environment.[33] The economy, the school, the church, etc., are all examples of subsystems within society. While each subsystem is bounded from other subsystems within the social system, interaction and component intersection between various subsystems exists. As previously noted, Easton's model is of the political subsystem within society. It is the mechanism through which society's values are authoritatively allocated.

Several significant components comprise the model under consideration. These components include inputs, the conversion system, outputs, feedback, and the environment. At the local level the school board represents the focal point of educational governance. As a conversion system, it is the recogized institution through which policy decisions regarding education at the local level are made. Such decisions and policies which proceed from the board are known as outputs. To comprehend the

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[32]Wayne K. Hoy and Cecil G. Miskel, Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice third edition (New York: Random House, 1987): 55.

[33]While systems theory and analysis does have utility, its limitations have also been noted: 1) the model is extremely general, i.e. what specifically constitutes the environment? 2) it is often difficult to distinguish the environment from the organization/institution; 3) systems analysis tends to be too global in its orientation and ignores the individual. See Campbell et. al., Organization and Control, pp. 446f.

form and nature of system outputs it is imperative that one be aware of the environmental influences on the system under consideration. A given school board exists within a specific context or environment. This environment may be characterized as the sum total of all cultural influences, temporal demands/considerations, and geographical factors that surround the board.[34] The environment acts upon the school board in the form of stress.[35] Stress from the social environment generates inputs of demand and support for the conversion system. The system then attempts to reduce or convert stress inputs into outputs, which subsequently serve as feedback to the environment. Such feedback will either exacerbate or ameliorate the stress present in the environment. A system that fails to reduce stress

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[34]This general description of the environment which surrounds the school board is given for a purpose. Such a description provides one with the latitude to be as general or as specific as he pleases in describing the environment of this institution. "Cultural influences" may be used in reference to the governmental patterns, norms, mores of a community, state or nation. "Temporal demands" allow one to consider the influence of personalities and specific time-bound events which occur in the environment, i.e. an economic recession or depression, a war, a national or community tragedy, etc. "Geographical factors" may be used to describe the area of the country in which a specific school board is found and the subsequent culture that pervades in that area--also the influences of the state and national governments on localities. This description of the environment is intended to be as encompassing as possible.

[35]In fact, stress is the link between the political system and other subsystems. Furthermore, stress personifies the conditions of the environment. Stress can be anything that seriously threatens the equilibrium of the environment, i.e. a scandal, a war, a catastrophe, economic conditions, a play for power, etc., see Easton, A Framework, p. 9.

will collapse.[36]

Easton's model can be used to examine the problems and processes of educational policy at any level of government--federal, state or local. In this context the local level of policy-making as threatened by state government is the concern. If one conceptualizes the local school board as a political subsystem--more specifically as the conversion component within the local educational policy-making subsystem--then state and federal governments and the pressures generated on the local board by their mandates/legislation may be considered a part of the board's larger environment. As a part of this environment, state and federal government contribute to the stress which generates the supports and demands made on the local board. Using Easton's model, the crux of the argument being considered may be conceived as follows: at present, the environmental stresses being generated by the educational mandates, legislation, and demands of state government threaten the collapse of that conversion subsystem known as the local school board.

A second theoretical framework which proves beneficial in understanding the intrusion of state government on the local school board is William Boyd's political economy paradigm.[37] Arguing for the use of such concepts as "rational self-interest"

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[36]Easton, A Framework, p. 8.

[37]William L. Boyd, "The Political Economy of Public Schools," Educational Administration Quarterly 18 3 (Summer 1982): 111-130.

and "maximization of benefits", Boyd suggests that educational administrators and professionals seek, through rational self-interest, to maximize rewards for themselves. This is done by manipulating the educational system and its incentives. Although Boyd's focus would seem to be on the individual, raising the unit of analysis to that of the local school board appears quite conceivable. By doing this, the school board emerges as a collective entity acting in a rational, self-interested manner. Using this paradigm, the local board can be understood as seeking to maximize its power and control against outside forces, namely, state and federal government. On the other hand, the same description holds true for state educational agencies and legislators as well. State government also seeks to maximize its power and control against forces in its environment, i.e. local school boards, federal educational mandates/legislation, etc.

## HISTORICAL AND LEGAL PRECEDENTS

Local governance of education has been a distinguishing feature of the American tradition. In spite of the legal jurisdiction of state government, important policy and decision-making authority has historically been delegated by the states to local school boards. Few components of American political ideology are as firmly inbred as the local control of schools.[38] According to Campbell, the roots of this conviction spring from

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[38]Kirst, "The State Role," p. 95.

two sources.[39] The first is found in the deep desire for freedom held by our founding fathers. This desire was made evident in the creation of a polity which reflects a disdain for distant government. The second springs from the exigencies of the rigorous environment faced by early Americans.[40] Yet in spite of this tradition, an unprecedented growth of state influence over local education has occurred since the 1960's.

The question of who controls or is responsible for the outcomes of public education has not always been clear. To fully understand how this locus of control has shifted, it is imperative that one consider the history of education in the United States. Since the beginnings of the common school movement in the 1830's the control of education in this country has passed through four identifiable phases:[41]

| | |
|---|---|
| I---LAY CONTROL | (1835-1900) |
| II--CONTROL BY LOCAL PROFESSIONIALS | (1900-1965) |
| III--NATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION | (1954-1972) |
| IV--STATE CONTROL | (1970-PRESENT) |

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[39]Campbell, et. al., Organization and Control, p. 77.

[40]This latter idea sounds very much like Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis. Ibid.

[41]Although each of these enumerated phases has been given dates, these are not to be considered as fixed. What is of concern is the distinguishing features and locus of control which appear to characterize each phase. Ideas for this classification were drawn primarily drawn from two sources; however, liberties have been taken to rename and reclassify. See Harmon, L. Zeigler, Harvey J. Tucker, and L. A. Wilson, "How School Control Was Wrested From the People," Phi Delta Kappan (March 1977): 534-539. Also, Guthrie, "The Pursuit of Equality, Efficiency and Liberty."

Although it is apparent that a degree of overlap exists between certain phases, a distinct locus of educational control distinguishes each from the others.

From 1835 to 1900 control of education in this country rested primarily with local boards of education. During this time boards exercised a great deal of freedom. Likewise, citizens enjoyed substantial opportunities to interact with and influence local policy-makers. A further distinguishing feature of this period was the quantity of boards/districts which were formed. The number of school boards and board members increased faster during this period than at any other time in the history of American education.[42] This naturally provided for a wide variety of governing methods and means. Yet, although a variety of school governance patterns existed, local boards "ran" the schools.[43] As school systems increased in size and ethnic diversity, lay boards found themselves unable to deal with the day to day administration of schools. This realization led to the emergence of the "superintendent-clerk." As is implied in the title, the primary function of this new position was initially clerical in nature. Although responsive to a greater extent than is true today, school boards of this era found themselves open to

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[42]In the early 1900's there were as many as 130,000 independent districts across the U.S. By 1950 there were approximately 71,094. Today there are around 16,000 school districts. See Campbell, Organization and Control, p. 87.

[43]Zeigler suggests that most school board members believed their responsibility to be that of the administration of schools. Zeigler et. al., "How School Control," p. 534.

excessive corruption and domination by local machines and personalities.

The second phase of American education, 1900-1965, is marked by a shift in the locus of control from local laymen to local professionals. As previously noted, corruption had infiltrated many governmental entities. In the midst of such conditions, progressive and urban reform movements began to emerge. One of the primary thrusts of progressivism was an attempt by reformers to replace the politics used to administer public services with the new "apolitical" ideas of scientific management. The predominant value underlying this new management was efficiency--efficiency based on scientific principles. Mythical seeds which sought to sever the connection between educational administration and politics were planted in hopes that the most efficient system of educational management would emerge.[44] Education found itself looking for the "one best way" of doing business.

Phase II also witnessed a dramatic shift in the composition of boards of education. In addition to becoming fewer in number, boards lost the representative character typical of Phase I. Zeigler notes that in 1896 professionals and businessmen constituted 14% of the average board.[45] However, by 1927, the year of the first systematic national survey of board members,

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[44]As noted in the introduction of this paper, the apolitical myth and closed system perception of education and educational governance was perpetuated until about 1960. The work of Eliot, Easton and others successfully challenged this view.

[45]Zeigler et. al., "How School Control," p. 536.

this same group constituted over 85% of all boards.[46] The move towards professionalization also saw a shift in the role of the superintendent from that of clerk to chief policy maker. An important policy suggested by leading superintendents involved the hiring of professionals to oversee the work in schools.[47] This demand gave birth to the field of educational adminstration.[48]

Ushered in by the landmark decision Brown vs Topeka Board of Education, phase III (1954-1972) witnessed the further erosion of local discretion. During these years the locus of educational control began to shift toward the federal government. At issue was the value of equality. Schools were perceived as the primary vehicle for providing equality of economic opportunity for all, i.e. racial minorities, Brown vs BOE, (1954); the poor, ESEA, (1965); and the handicapped, PL 94-142, (1972). While the

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[46]Counts' research revealed that 90% of board members were male, 96% white, 70% were college graduates, 36% earned incomes in excess of $30,000 or more, 66% were from business and the professions, and 85% were Protestant. The work down by Counts is a classic study of the composition of school boards during and following the Progressive/professional movement in the U.S. The irony of the matter lies in the fact that recent research indicates a similar composition of boards across the country. See George S. Counts, The Social Composition of Boards of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927). For a recent description of local boards see Carol, et. al., School Boards, pp. 7-8.

[47]Guthrie, "The Pursuit of Equality, Efficiency, and Liberty," pp. 98-99.

[48]Educational Administration as an area of serious study began to emerge around 1910. Men such as George Strayer and Elwood Cubberley were pioneers in the field. See Roald F. Campbell, Thomas Fleming, L. Jackson Newell, and John W. Bennion, A History of Thought and Practice in Educational Administration (New York: Teachers College Press, 1987): 173.

verdict as to the total impact of federal intervention may never be known, reduction of certain inequities is evident. For example, it seems obvious that the opportunites availible to minorities have drastically improved since 1954. Ironically, however, Jencks has suggested that educational growth in fact increases rather than decreases social and economic inequality.[49] Such an accusation represents a serious challenge to the primary thrust of phase III. Nevertheless, as can be seen by the evolution of school control portrayed in this and preceding phases, the effects of increased federal involvement served only to further reduce the decision-making authority of the local policy-makers.

Domination of educational policy-making by the states is the hallmark of the current phase, 1970-PRESENT. Although providing leadership in certain areas of need, the federal government in recent years has taken the initiative to shift the burden of education back to the states. This initiative was clearly evident in the Texas school finance reform case brought before the Supreme Court in 1973.[50] Republican leadership in the White House and its concern for decentralization also paved the

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[49]Christopher Jencks, Inequality, A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America (New York: Basic Books, 1972).

[50]Rodriguez vs San Antonio Independent School District, The Court determined that educational policy was a matter to be determined by the states, not the federal government. The hearing of this significant case marked a shift in the burden of educational policy back to the states. See Charles S. Benson, The Economics of Public Education third edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1978): 342.

way for increased state initiatives in education. With the imposition of federal mandates and accompanying dollars, the states have been given both the impetus and leverage needed to insure compliance on the local level. Thus, phase IV--control of education by the states--would appear to be rooted in the initiatives begun by the federal government in phase III. While there has been a definite shift of control towards the states, the precise starting point of this shift is difficult to locate.

At present states provide over half of every education dollar at the local level.[51] In addition to creating a demand for accountability, such an investment allows for the control of certain policy decisions by the state. Campbell et al. classify common state educational policy-making prerogatives into five general categories: instructional standards and decisions; certification standards and decisions; school finance distribution; facilities standards; and statutes regarding local governance.[52] State control of education is maintained through the implementation and funding of specific policies within these areas. Such implementation has led to the creation of substantial educational bureaucratic structures in most states. On the average, these state bureaucracies have tripled in size

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[51]Kirst, Who Controls Our Schools?, p. 11. Support for public education has certainly shifted from the local to state level. From 1969-1979 state sources for revenue for public education grew 44.5%, see Estimates of School Statistics, 1978-79 (Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1979): 20, 25.

[52]Campbell, et al., The Organization and Control, pp. 68-69.

since 1970.[53]

In 1977, Frederick Wirt conducted an empirical analysis focusing on the degree and variety of state control of thirty-six selected areas of school policy.[54] He began by assembling statutes, constitutions, and court opinions for the purposes of determining the degree of state control surrounding each policy. He then rated the level of state control for each on a five point scale: 0-absence of state authority, 1-permissive local autonomy, 2-required local autonomy, 3-extensive local option under state-mandated requirement, 4-limited local option under state-mandated requirement, 5-no local option under state-mandated requirement, 6-total state assumption. He found that state control varied widely. Hawaii ranked first with a score of 6.00--total state assumption. Wyoming, on the other hand, ranked last with a score of 1.86. The average score was 3.56 reflecting a balance of local and state control.[55] Policies reflecting

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[53]In addition to this Murphy identifies the following trends in state educational governance: 2) governors becoming more active in educational policy-making; 3) powerful professional educational coalitions being divided over labor disputes; 4) a more open pluralistic and politicized decision-making process. Murphy, "The State Role in Education," p. 20.

[54]Frederick Wirt, "School Policy Culture and State Centralization" in Yearbook on the Politics of Education, edited by Jay Scribner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977): 164-187.

[55]Louisiana ranked 37th among the states with a score of 3.19. Eleven years later the balance appears to be shifting towards the state. A 1988 survey of school board members across the state of Louisiana (N=680, n=151) revealed the following perceptions: 1) 42% of the respondents felt that state government had the greatest effect on reducing the local board's decision-making discretion; 2) 37% felt interference from the state was the greatest obstacle

high state control were teacher certification, attendance requirements, accreditation, vocational education, special education, curriculum, textbooks, safety-health policy, transportation, graduation requirements, and revenue generation/distribution. Policies allowing for bimodal control between state and local government included: evaluation, personnel training, expenditures, extracurricular activities, experimental programs, and teacher/pupil ratios. It would appear that the character of these state initiatives identified and discussed above focuses on the heart of educational policy, namely what should be taught, how it should be taught, who should teach, and how education should be organized.

However, lest one be surprised at this "intrusion" by the state, it must be remembered that education is de jure a state function. Since references to education cannot be found in the Constitution, education in the United States is a prerogative "reserved to the states respectively."[56] From the legal standpoint, federal and local control of education are secondary to the power exercised by the states. Most state constitutions contain detailed statutes that delineate how educational

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to local control of education in their district; 3) 50% of responding board members felt that the state exerted more control over education in their district than they did. Bob Johnson, "Perceptions of Louisiana School Boardmen on Issues of Local Control," Unpublished survey, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988.

[56]The Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution reads as follows, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively or the people."

governance is to proceed. Furthermore, much of this control is legally delegated to district boards of education and other state created agencies. Since therefore local school boards, on the basis of law, are state agencies delegated to govern the local schools according to state law, it follows that school board members are state and not local officials.[57] Realization of this truth often finds the board member between the proverbial "rock and hard place." As an agent of the state he must fulfill the mandates of the state. Yet as an elected official he must give expression to the will of his local constituency.[58]

In addition to the challenge posed by states to local control, there is further pressure exerted from other sources. The federal courts, teachers' unions and organizations, and powerful national lobby groups such as big business also threaten local discretion. Considering such pressures and regardless of what is believed about the local control of education, it is eroding.

**ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS SURROUNDING LOCAL CONTROL**

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[57]This issue was settled with McGilvra vs. Seattle School District No. 1, 1921. For a review of this and other cases establishing the legal basis of the States' prerogatives in education see Kern Alexander, School Law (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1980): 71-165.

[58]In a recent survey of school board members in Louisiana 60% of those responding saw themselves as an extension of state government. However, 77% of the 151 respondents perceived their primary legal responsibility to be to the constituents of their district and not to the state. Furthermore, 87% of respondents felt that local control of education was to preferred to state and federal control. Johnson, "Perceptions of Louisiana Boardmen."

In light of recent state initiatives and against this historical and legal backdrop, one is forced to examine the issues and arguments which surround the crusade against centralization. According to Coombs, state encroachment on local prerogatives risks weakening the broad base of political and financial support enjoyed by public education in this country.[59] Furthermore, centralization threatens to dampen an important component of successful education: citizen interest. It is argued that improvement in education, to be truly effective, needs the support of the people in the local community.[60] The logic of this argument rests in the belief that local governance of education is in fact more responsive to taxpayers' demands and human needs. The more distant the control, the greater the chance that the educational program will not meet these needs.[61] In addition, distant control would appear to inhibit the sense of community ownership of schools. When the authority of the local board is transcended by state educational agencies, schools tend to lose grassroots political support.

A second argument against centralization focuses on the flexibility and responsiveness inherent in local control. Of all the entities within the local family of government, educational

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[59]Coombs, "The Effects of Increased State Control", p. 7.

[60]Carol, et al., School Boards, p. iii-iv.

[61]French, "Local Control Under Attack," p. 14.

government may well be the most responsive to constituents.[62] Citizens appear to have a reasonably clear idea of where to turn with regard to educational matters. Balkanization and centralization of educational governance at the state level runs the risk of clouding that perception.[63] This seems to be an important advantage of local control. In addition, there are times when state regulations prove excessively rigid and lack the adaptability needed to fit into diverse local contexts. In light of the realization that there is no optimal, all-encompassing educational technology, flexibility is needed to adjust to the variety of circumstances which exists across districts.[64] Opponents to centralization argue that local officials, as opposed to state bureaucrats, are in the best position to judge what is needed in their districts.

Perhaps the greatest argument against the centralization of educational governance is that it threatens liberty--the ability to choose and govern--at the local level. As noted earlier,

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[62]Boyd makes this observation in a discussion comparing the responsiveness of various local governmental entities. See William L. Boyd, "The Public, the Professionals and Educational Policy-making: Who Governs?" Teachers College Record 80 (1978): 575-577.

[63]Ibid.

[64]To say that this is an important advantage is not to imply that all school districts can be characterized as being flexible and adaptable. Burlingame suggests that school systems, especially urban districts, tend to behave as unresponsive bureaucracies. He further suggests that suburban districts are perhaps more responsive than urban districts. This difference may be attributable to a public which possesses the skills to express their wants. Burlingame, "The Politics of Education," p. 441. See also Wirt and Kirst, Schools in Conflict, pp. 230f.

liberty, equity, and efficiency are traditional American values. Ironically the three cannot be pursued to the fullest extent concomitantly without generating some type of conflict.[65] The debate between adherents of local and state control is really over two of these values: equality and freedom. Is the freedom to govern at the local level valued more than the providing of equal education opportunity through state intervention? Traditionally, state involvement has been minimal and local boards have enjoyed freedom. This freedom was challenged, however, by the school finance reformers of the 70's who clearly valued equality over the freedom of local control. Yet concern for equality at the state and federal levels runs the risk of challenging the freedoms of a substantial number of parents in affluent areas who feel their children are entitled to the finest education their districts can afford. To ignore this fact would result in the alienation of these taxpayers. Research by Tucker suggests that the key determinants of educational quality are essentially local in character and are best realized when administered from the local level.[66] Local control, as opposed to state and federal control of education, fosters greater citizen awareness, participation and engagement--all democratic

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[65]See Guthrie, "The Pursuit."

[66]M. S. Tucker, "Educational Quality Act," unpublished memorandum (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1977).

virtues.[67]

While the face value of such reasoning may indeed appear cogent, the arguments put forth in support of increased state control of education seem equally compelling. Low test scores, high dropout rates, increased violence, poor minority performance, substandard teaching, etc. have all combined to evoke a public demand for educational reform. Adherents of centralization argue that few local boards have the resources, ability, and motivation to satisfy this demand. Only state government, they insist, can effectively deal with such problems that transcend both the scope and resources of the individual district. For example, with the absence of uniform performance standards or minimum funding levels, poorer, isolated districts may offer inferior services. For many, increased state involvement at the local level is not only needed but demanded. In spite of tradition, the legal basis of such demands are sound. A second argument in favor of centralization involves the issue of equality. Beginning with the civil rights movement in the 60's, concern for equality--in the form of equal educational opportunity--has been a prominent characteristic of the national mood. Local boards have lacked both the resources and the motivation to provide EEO for all, especially for those with special needs, i.e. handicapped, disadvantaged, minorities, bilingual, etc. Furthermore, the disparity of wealth from district to district has resulted in unfair advantages and

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[67]Coombs, "The Effects of State Control," pp. 10-13.

disadvantages for many. The appearance of lawsuits such as Serrano vs Priest (1971) and Rodriguez vs San Antonio School District (1973), represent attempts to addresses these inequities. What has emerged is a doctrine of "fiscal neutrality": the education of a child is a function of the wealth of the state as a whole and not of the wealth of a given district.[68] Advocates of increased state involvement in education claim that the state is in the best position to see that EEO for all children is provided.

The perceived impotence of local boards constitutes a third argument for greater state involvement in education. This impotence has several causes, namely, confused priorities among boards, political cross pressures, stale methods, diverse student populations, and poorly trained, unmotivated leadership and staff.[69] Further contributing is the unwillingness of local boards to be innovative or to adopt innovative programs in general.[70] School boards are perceived by state policy-makers as being defensive and reactive as opposed to offensive and

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[68]Alexander, School Law, pp. 776-821.

[69]D.P. Crandall, J.W. Eiseman and K.S. Louis, "Strategic Planning Issues that Bear on the Success of School Improvement Efforts," 22 3 Educational Administration Quarterly (1986): 21-53.

[70]Kirst, "The State Role in Regulating," p. 17. In fact, Clark et al. go as far as to suggest that school boards and communities appear to be more effective at preventing change than in promoting it. See D. L. Clark, L. S. Lotto, and T.A. Astuto, "Effective Schools and School Improvement: A Comparative Analysis of Two Lines of Inquiry," 20 3 Educational Administration Quarterly (1984): 55.

creative.[71] All of these perceptions, combined with the inability of districts to deal with increasingly demanding and militant teacher groups, have convinced many to look to the state for guidance.[72]

## THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

Contemplation of the arguments for and against local control may very well create a sense of ambivalence regarding the issue. Once again, this ambivalence would seem to revolve around the juxtaposition of two American values: equality and liberty. The rationale for state intervention is both legally and logistically sound. The state finds itself in a better position to see that equality, equitable distribution of resources, and standardization of instruction across districts are achieved. Nevertheless, the basis for local control is likewise sound. Local control guarantees that policies and programs work efficiently and effectively where they must--in specific classrooms with specific students.[73] Recently, the IEL concluded that the local school board, as that uniquely American institution of representative and participatory government, is the best vehicle for the "people" to retain control of their

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[71]Carol, et al., School Boards, p. 38.

[72]Crandall et al. are convinced that "top down" approaches like external mandates from the state represent effective educational improvement strategies. Crandall et al., "Strategic Planning."

[73]Kirst, Who Controls Our Schools?, p. 125.

schools.[74] In the area of education, it has been suggested that the greatest contribution of higher levels of government would be to lay out the road map and leave the driving to local school boards.[75]

Future efforts to maintain and strengthen local control, however, face some demanding challenges.[76] To begin with the momentum of state involvement in education appears to be increasing. There are three reasons why this momentum is likely to continue for the next few years. First, education is by law a state and not a local function. Second, rising costs and increasing demands, created in part by state and federal mandates, force local boards to look to the state for financial assistance. In addition, dependence on state government results in less control and more accountability for local districts.

A further challenge focuses on questions of effectiveness. If, in fact, the strength of local boards lies in their ability to deliver services effectively, then they must do just that--be effective. Because school boards are charged by states to make policy and govern local education, their willingness and capacity to provide effective leadership could very well determine their own destiny. Effective leadership begins by identifying a valued set of comprehensive criteria that will define the meaning of effectiveness, i.e. specific achievement score averages, student-

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[74]Carol, et al., School Boards, p. iii.

[75]French, "Local Control Under Attack," p. 17.

[76]Campbell, et al., Organization and Control, pp. 74f, 99.

teacher ratios, financial efficiency, etc. Recent outcries for reform have in part been motivated by the local district's inability to be effective in certain areas, i.e declining test scores, poor instruction, excessive drop out rates, etc. Definition of this "effectiveness" criteria will require the successful integration of diverse community interests into a workable educational policy.

Mitchell notes a recent conservative ideological drift which has elevated issues of parental choice and educational quality at the expense of equity.[77] If this is in fact true, local boards seek to gain. However, in order for local boards to reestablish themselves as potent policy-making entities several conditions must be met. Initially, local boards must develop a clear cut strategy to reverse the aggressive state policy trend of recent years.[78] This strategy must involve a plan to reduce certain state educational codes and mandates while pursuing others. Those policies deemed to be in the interest of the nation and state would be developed, i.e. integration decisions, minimum standards, financial subsidies for all recognized minorities in need (racial, social and otherwise), etc. Moreover, a redefinition of local control which recognizes the local district rather than the state as the critical nexus between the child and

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[77]Douglas E. Mitchell, "Educational Politics and Policy: The State Level," in Handbook of Research on Educational Administration edited by Norman J. Boyan (New York: Longman, 1988): 458.

[78]According to Carol, et al., this has not been done. See Carol, et al., School Boards, p. 38.

the educational process is needed.[79]

Without a doubt the American debate about local control will continue. Many of the issues surrounding this debate are perennial and reflect the basic tensions of a democratic society. At times this system of shared state and local control creates a functional tension that leads to better policy.[80] Nevertheless, it would appear that local discretion is likely to become narrower in the years ahead. Regardless of what the future holds, school boards will continue to play some role in the governance of education in this country. Whether this role will be positive and on the cutting edge, only time will tell.[81]

## POSSIBLE AREAS FOR RESEARCH

At present, research in educational politics follows two well-defined strands.[82] The first involves the use of traditional political science concepts and methods to examine educational systems. Examples of research in this area include topics such as the following: How do community power structures influence the shape of local educational governance? What role do educational interest groups play in the shaping of policy? What factors account for the distribution of power among various stakeholders in a given educational system? How do state and

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[79]Kirst, Who Controls Our Schools?, p. 134.

[80]Campbell, et al., Organization and Control, p. 190.

[81]Muth and Azumi, "School Reform", p. 10.

[82]Mitchell, "Educational Politics and Policy," p. 455.

community political cultures influence educational governance in a given community?, etc. Generally speaking, the focus of this tradition has been on the identification and description of the processes of educational politics.

Rather than focusing on processes, the second strand of research in the politics of education concentrates on educational policy. Concern here is for the products which emerge from the processes of the educational system.[83] The products which come from this system take the form of policy. Within this strand of research a given policy is examined from all angles: formulation, selection, implementation and evaluation. Questions of interest in this area might assume the following forms: What factors led to the formulation of this particular policy? What factors hinder successful implementation of a new statewide teacher evaluation program? What are the effects of the new policy regarding teacher certification on educational outcomes? The first strand identified is properly known as "politics of education" research, the second "educational policy" research.[84] When contemplating the inter-governmental tensions surrounding educational governance, potential avenues of investigation can be identified in each research strand.

A fundamental political science question to be addressed

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[83]It should be kept in mind that "educational system" or "subsystem," as the context warrants, may be used in reference to any of the following units of analysis: local, state, or federal governance.

[84]Mitchell, "Educational Politics and Policy," p. 455.

focuses on the identification of those governing arrangements between state and local government which lead to the most functional educational governing structure possible. In light of identified educational outcomes, what is that optimal set of provisions between governments that proves most beneficial to the education of our children? What, if any, contingents must be considered? Any answer to these questions must address the following as well: 1) What is the appropriate role of the state in education?; 2) What is the appropriate role of the local school board in education?; 3) How is a "functional educational governing structured" to be defined? 4) What are the underlying tensions between and among the state and local government and at what point, under what conditions, are these tensions dysfunctional?

As can be seen, these questions are general in nature. Nevertheless, they are fundamental and in the wake of current perceptions, stand in need of further investigation. At the heart of the issue surrounding the struggle between states and localities is the attempt to identify the "optimal arrangement" for education. While seeking to identify this optimal mix may appear unreasonable and idealistic, the value of such an effort lies in the potential contributions made to model and theory construction.

In seeking to construct such theories Burlingame and Geske raise an important methodological concern. Both contend that undue attention has been given to the particular features of

states and too little to the formulation of general propositions and explanatory theories.[85] Within the present context this contention could be extended to include examinations of local boards as well. Efforts at model construction and theory building should look past the particulars and seek to identify generic political processes.

Research focusing on the educational policy issues surrounding state and local relations is likewise needed. According to Murphy, herein lies some of the most important work to be done.[86] For example, the effects of state policy on local educational systems is deserving of attention. The unit of analysis for such a study could assume one of two forms: the individual policy or aggregate state policy. Using the latter as the unit of analysis and as the independent variable, possible research questions might include the following: What kind of relationship exists between the degree of centralized educational control in a state and: 1) local support of education as reflected in school board election turnouts?; 2) incidences of conflict among local boards?; 3) citizens' sense of ownership towards schools in their neighborhood?; 4) educational outcomes such as student achievement?; 5) the degree of helplessness felt by local board members? 6) the degree of bureaucratic structure which exists at the district level?, etc. An investigation

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[85]Martin Burlingame and Terry G. Geske, "State Politics and Education: An Examination of Selected Multiple-State Case Studies," Educational Administration Quarterly 15 2 (Spring 1979): 65.

[86]Murphy, "The State Role in Education," p. 46.

could also be undertaken to examine the relationship between the degree of state educational policy centralization and the level of conflict experienced by various kinds of school boards, i.e. homogeneous vs. heterogeneous; rural vs. urban; Southern district vs. Northern district; predominantly white vs. predominantly black, etc.

Research on the implementation phase of state educational policy is also deserving of attention. Motivations for research in this vein are based on the realization that this is the crucial link between the state and local boards. Implementation is the process whereby state educational policy is transferred into specific actions by the local board. The success or failure of a given policy is determined here. Board discretion still permits broad interpretation of how and where many state programs are to be implemented. As "street-level" bureaucrats, educational leaders at the local level have the ability to stymie and bring to naught state initiatives.[87] Further research is needed to determine how and why the face of state educational policy is transformed as a result of the implementation efforts

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[87]Using teachers at the local level as the unit of analysis, Weatherly and Lipsky examined the implementation actions taken by teachers in response to a state initiated program for handicapped students. See Richard Weatherly and Michael Lipsky, "Street-level Bureaucrats and Institutional Innovation: Implementing Special Education Reform," Harvard Educational Review 47 (1977): 171-197. Also, Michael Lipsky, Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

of local school boards.[88]

A final concern entails an overlapping of the two strands of educational research mentioned above--both policy and process. The problem finds expression in the following questions: Which level of educational governance is the appropriate level for the resolution of a given educational policy? What policies are best addressed by the local board? What policies are best addressed by the state? While the tackling of questions such as these may seem ambitious, it must be remembered that historically, a balance of educational governance has been achieved. Investigations into the conditions surrounding this dynamic equilibrium would prove enlightening.

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[88]Elmore has done some work in this area. He has identified four fundamentally different organizational theories of why state and federal educational policies are affected at the implementation phase: 1) inadequate or unintelligent management at the local level; 2) bureaucratic subversion by a district; 3) alienation or disengagement by local educational leaders; 4) insufficient power and financial resources at the local level. See R. Elmore, "Organizational Models and Social Program Implementation." Public Policy 26 2 (1978): 185-228.

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